

COMMENTARY

THE FUTURE OF ARAB-JEWISH RELATIONS

The Key is the Cooperation of Equal and Separate States

AUBREY S. EBAN

THE peace on Israel's borders may be no more than the peace of a quiescent volcano; and the crisis of the state in its immediate external relationships remains unsolved. With this reserve, any friend of Israel would be less than human if he could not look back and indulge at least a brief twinge of pride. No political program in history has ever been assailed with such predictions of woe as partition and Jewish statehood. It would lead, said the

prophets, to chronic war. Yet for the first time in the whole story, Arabs and Jews face each other, with no foreign army between them, in conditions which seem to put war either beyond their political interest or their resources. The Jews would be massacred, said their friends (in tutelary concern) and their enemies (in gleeful and almost genuine belief). There is indeed much loss and bereavement in Israel; unless the black-bordered newspaper notices are kept in mind, the public mood cannot be accurately gauged. Yet by the precedents of history, it is hard to imagine a nation born out of conflict with less bloodshed.

Little is heard these days of holy war. The fire and brimstone of Arab speeches a few months back now appear merely pyrotechnic—as many, not always with confidence, predicted. The Arab chest-beating amidst strident calls for *Jihad* and crusade had become a little tedious even to those who advocated surrender to it. Thus, when the implacable furies, threatening to sweep all before them, become the abject recipients of alms at the very table of the Security Council, poetic justice is upheld.

It was said that a Jewish state could not arise amidst such hostility, or exist in economic separation from Arab Palestine. It has arisen; it exists. The newspapers and the official *Gazette* show the whole process

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and routine—judges and registrars being appointed, envoys dispatched and received, stamps and banknotes printed, ministers interrogated, police and army units inspected, men recruited and exempted, officers decorated and promoted, controllers of manpower, industries, diamonds, currency, food supplies appointed. This has all happened in three months. The machine of Jewish statehood has never for a moment looked improvised or transient. Nobody who suggests that all this can be revoked even expects himself to be taken seriously. The Mediator finds the existence of a Jewish government to be the only stable element in a scene where all else is fluid and confused. Where the prophets of disaster foresaw the prelude of a great-power conflict, we have the Soviet and American flags fluttering on the Gat Rimmon—with Israel's mediating banner in between.

IN DRAMATIC terms all this forms a well-rounded conclusion. But the curtain has not fallen; there is no assurance yet that Israel will live happily ever after. Support for Zionism in Europe or America can not fully compensate for the absence of a harmony with the immediate world in which Israel must live. This is not to underrate the achievement of Zionism in reconstructing an impressive system of international support starting from its low fortunes and precarious status in the spring of 1947. But when this is duly appraised, the need for a comparable political victory in the field of regional relations becomes even more obvious. Without that victory Israel can hope at the best for an armistice; never for a peace. The requirements of military preparedness and the effects of regional boycott will frustrate the initiative of a developing and thriving society. Having beaten off a violent siege, Israel may honorably aspire not to live besieged forever.

That Arab-Jewish agreement is a Jewish interest may be held a self-evident truth. Zionism cannot be accused of ever doubting that truth, even if its efforts to vindicate it often lacked the conviction and tenacity

which were usually devoted to other agreed Zionist objectives. What may now begin to emerge as a truth equally self-evident is the proposition that Arab-Jewish agreement is an Arab interest as well. Now this has never yet been held by the Arabs even as a perfunctory slogan. And it would be wrong to dismiss the Zionist Congress resolutions about Arab friendship, just because they remained mere words. For these words, rehearsed to the point of platitudes, had a deep educative effect. Every Zionist knew Arab-Jewish friendship to be at least an objective worthy of attainment, even if he did or could do little to attain it. Conversely, the Arab slogans that the idea of peace with Zionism must never for a moment be harbored in any patriotic heart have deeply affected Arab nationalist thinking and paralyzed its flexibility.

There has been no objective Arab attempt since the days of Feisal to weigh up the consequences of permanent conflict with Zionism against those of a harmonious accord. No less discerning a writer than Mr. Albert Hourani could bring himself to believe that the Arabs could live without Jewish friendship, while the Jews, once confronted with the Arabs in the absence of an intermediary, would need Arab tolerance so acutely that they would purchase it on Arab terms.

This view rested on what proved to be a wrong appreciation of the balance of power. The Arab League was deemed so to outweigh the total Jewish potential that all that was necessary was to leave the two parties alone, whereupon a unitary Palestine would arise as an act of Arab will, even without Jewish consent. When the Arab spokesmen were asked how they proposed to prevent Jewish Palestine from seceding, how to drive immigrants from its shores, to establish authority over its economy and industrial machine, to secure the allegiance of Jews for Arab-dominated legislation, they could only point amiably to the colossus of the Arab League which was to carry out these painful but brief operations by the strength of its hands.

It was the failure to prove this appreciation of relative power, as well as considerations of equity and conscience, which discredited the unitary state idea with every tribunal to which it was submitted. It was only by arithmetic that one could prove the theoretical capacity of the Arabs to rule all Palestine. By the really substantial criteria of relative strength they could do no such thing.

When the test came, the Palestine Arab leadership, which had claimed the right to dominate Jewish Palestine in the name of arithmetic, proved itself within a few weeks unable even to rally Arab Palestine into the semblance of an organized national group. It could not feed a village or defend a town or govern a local council. Its leaders, prudently distributed in the more remote and secure Arab capitals, exhorted their followers to "fight for a hundred years." But their followers, by the myriads, refusing to fight for a hundred minutes, followed their leaders into exile and destroyed even the arithmetical basis of their unitary ideal. The roles are now balanced, if not reversed. Arabs and Jews need each other for any progress or any escape from deadlock. If anything, Israel can more afford an attitude of self-sufficiency and plough a lone furrow, though it would be ill advised to seek that solitude or be satisfied with it. But the salient new fact created since May 14 is that the Arab world must either seek an adjustment with Israel or sink ever deeper into a mire of international discredit, social disturbance, and political upheaval.

PARTITION is in essence a theory of Arab-Jewish relations. The theory is that there are two peoples in Palestine, each with separate national aspirations; that neither can do without the full satisfaction of those aspirations, at least in a limited area; that each can best cooperate with the other on the basis of its own integrity and freedom; that the mutual elements of social and economic interest can only assert themselves in free and spontaneous contracts; that a tendency of unified life can only grow up, if at all, from

within and cannot be imposed initially from without; that between two national entities so organically distinct the ideal relationship is cooperation, not unity.

So much of this is axiomatic that it is staggering to reflect how hard the partition idea had to struggle until it overcame, one after the other, all the hurdles of international scrutiny and criticism. In the various United Nations organs the theory of separate national rights was repeatedly weighed in the balance against the formulas of unity—federation and confederation. History can show no federation which ever grew up except by the voluntary union of separate and independent units. "It is hardly possible to impose unity without consent," declared the Canadian representative, with whom a federal way of thinking was the point of departure. A member of the Peel Commission has told me that he and all his colleagues, in writing their report, were conscious of advocating a pro-Arab solution. The United Nations Special Committee too was not absorbed in a pro-Jewish conspiracy. That partition offered something infinitely precious to the Jews should not obscure the gifts which it bestowed upon the Arabs. A new unit of Arab independence was to be created in addition to the seven already existing. Nine hundred thousand Arabs who form three quarters of Palestine's Arab population were offered the chance of living in a purely Arab state. Two purely Arab states—Transjordan and Arab Palestine—were to be established on seven-eighths of the territory originally set aside for the Palestine Mandate with its "primary purpose," as the Royal Commission testified, "of establishing a Jewish national home."

In the approaching weeks many a Palestine Arab may come to compare this prospect, which was peacefully available, with the results of the "holy war." These results include the invasion and decimation of Arab Palestine; the panic-stricken flight of its population with its leaders in the van; occupation by rival Arab armies with frank aims of annexation; social and economic disintegration; and the collapse of all corpor-

ate Arab life. In this manner have Palestine Arabs been saved by their Arab "friends" from their Jewish "enemies."

The rescuers themselves are not unscathed. Nailed to inaction by the Security Council's resolution, they face the clamor of their disillusioned public, the burden of a refugee problem, and the awkward interrogations which are the lot of all those who lose a war, whether "holy" or secular. That an understanding with Israel may hold more benefit than this is a thought that cannot fail to intrude into thoughtful Arab minds. If self-interest is even a subsidiary motive of political action, the Arabs must come to the conference table soon.

ARAB-JEWISH agreement is partly a matter of subjective attitude; partly a function of objective interest. In the former realm, a revolution is necessary on both sides. For several decades Arab affairs were marginal in Zionist politics; and Arab intransigence was a blessed excuse for Jewish inaction. That intransigence was real enough; and in the absence of any Arab will for contact no Jew could do much more than condition himself for the eventual and distant day when he would be required to live a Middle Eastern life. But even this essentially educative process cannot be deemed to have been carried far; there is as yet no adequate sense of Arab environment, although in recent years, as the Palestine-born youth grow to maturity, a franker relation with that environment has come to appear.

There were two schools of thought in the Yishuv on the question of an Arab accord. The predominant school argued that agreement would only follow the creation of accomplished facts. The Arabs would accept the Jews only if the Jewish existence clearly became firm and irrevocable. Therefore any growth in Jewish strength, every token of stability brought the day of agreement nearer. Fortified by this realism, a Zionist could plunge into the tasks of Jewish consolidation with a clear conscience about the Arab-Jewish future; and could even prove that a concession at the expense

of Jewish stability was a factor against agreement. The second school argued for prior consent. It insisted that a formula or device, be it parity, bi-nationalism, federalism, was available whereby Jews and Arabs could be drawn into at least a mood of acquiescence in the main aspirations of each other. If this were so, then a slackening of Jewish consolidation was the road of enlightened self-interest.

The first school could afford to forget about the Arabs; the second often forgot about the Jews, and made the wooing of Arab favor its primary concern. In a just world, those who gathered around Magnes, Kalvarisky, and Hashomer Hatzair might, on the merit of their more specialized and conscientious interest, have deserved to be the architects of Arab-Jewish agreement. But the world is more realistic than just. The doctrine of "accomplished fact" has been entirely vindicated against that of "prior consent." If Arab-Jewish accord is anywhere on the horizon, the credit belongs to those who proclaimed an independent Israel on May 14. In that deed they established the Jews in a status of political equality with the surrounding Arab world; and equality is the keynote, the very crux and core of the Arab-Jewish problem. By defending what they had created, Israel's founders made a strong case for those Arabs who wished to portray the existence of Israel as a dictate of history beyond recall. And let there be no mistake. An Arab cannot sit with Jews until he has proven there is no other way. By its logic and history, Arab nationalism can only seek a solution by peaceful means—when no other means are available.

It is the Arabs, not the Jews, who give validity to the doctrine of accomplished fact.

In September 1947 when I was attempting (with complete failure) to persuade Azam Pasha of the virtues of prior consent, he swept all argument aside with his doctrine of historic fatalism. "The Jews will have no state unless they obtain and hold it. By the logic of our history we shall

fight it. Unless you can first resist the entire Arab world you cannot even be entitled to discuss agreement. We once had Spain and Persia. If anyone had come beforehand and asked us to surrender Spain or Persia he would have received the same negative response as I now give you." In a later moment he confessed that the Arabs had become used to not having Spain and Persia. They might, he said, become used to not having part of Palestine—or else they might attempt a century-old irridentism and work up a crusade. Azzam Pasha, not predicting the sudden collapse of Arab tenacity, advocated the crusade rather than post-factum acquiescence. For prior consent he had only contemptuous things to say. He would never qualify for membership in Ihud.

THERE is no conference table yet, although the Arabs are certainly negotiating with the fatal Provisional Government of Israel, in that they deal with a Mediator who knows no other Jewish body. (It is only in London that the existence of the Provisional Government is veiled in euphemism, though not denied. Anglican worshippers presumably bow down to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and the "Jewish authorities.") At the moment the future of Arab-Jewish relations can only be envisaged in principle and outline.

The principle of political separation of Israel must obviously now prevail. The mystique of Palestinian unity has already done much harm in the decade following the Peel Commission, which reported that to imagine that Palestinian unity has any moral meaning "is a mischievous pretence." Indeed a body calling itself Ihud was sterile by its very name. Unity and cooperation are not kindred ideas; they stand in sharp antithesis—and the former is as false to this relationship as the latter is true.

For years the moral frontiers between Israel and Arab Palestine have existed in every zone of politics, economics, society, and culture. In all but the legal sense, to go from Tel Aviv to Nablus was to cross a wider boundary than from France to Ger-

many. An advocate of Franco-Teutonic unity would rightly be deemed a crackpot, while a champion of Franco-German cooperation is an aid to sanity in a distracted world. Yet high-minded people, cherishing the hope of peace, beguiled themselves for years with the pretence that Israel and the Arabs were or could be *one* people.

Those who argued that they were two peoples, who should recognize their distinctiveness—and having recognized it, cooperate—were called "extremists." One state was regarded as automatically better than two. Sovereignty was "antiquated," although in 1945 it was canonized in the Charter as the basis of the United Nations. Yet all this time the doctrine of political independence and regional cooperation was becoming the typical 20th-century ideal of international relations. In the Benelux Union, the Statute of Westminster, and the Pan-American Union, political separation was accepted as the prior condition of regional cooperation. The Netherlands representative at Lake Success had said this well: "Although our two peoples had very close ties, relations, and interests of a cultural, historical, ethnological, and economic nature, this unitary state ended rapidly and unsuccessfully. The differences between Arabs and Jews are much greater than those between Belgium and the Netherlands. . . . Now together with Luxembourg, those countries are reunited not politically but economically, and what counts now is not our political separation but our union for economic purposes. . . . History has taught our three countries this valuable lesson of independence combined with unity for certain important but limited purposes."

The argument is reinforced nearer home. For even the members of the Arab League, united in language, culture, and religion, make the safeguarding of their separate sovereignties their primary ideal. While Dr. Charles Malik exhorts the Jews to be swallowed up and peacefully digested by the Arab world, his own Republic of Lebanon, far less differentiated than Israel from its Arab environment, clings to its own sepa-

rate independence as an essential condition of its integration into the Arab world.

THE rise of Israel as a non-Arab nation and the existence of large non-Arab groups throughout the Fertile Crescent gives the idea of Near Eastern unity a new direction. It must be unity founded on a regional, not a racial basis. The ideal is not an Arab League constructed, as at present, on the basis of racial exclusiveness; but a Near Eastern League, comprising all the diverse nationalities of the area, each free within its own area of independence and cooperating with others for the welfare of the region as a whole. Once the criterion is geographical and not historical, it becomes possible to envisage Turkey, Christian Lebanon, Israel, and Iran as partners of the Arab world in a league of non-aggression, mutual defence, and economic cooperation. But if this is to be, Count Bernadotte, King Abdullah, and others had better forget about "confederations." The very word recalls the failures of the 19th century to face up to the exigencies of national independence movements. In every modern example of regional cooperation, the members cooperate only provided that they do not have to; a statutory provision or a joint board is fatal. The British dominions consult with increasing intimacy on all problems; but any effort to establish a fixed consultative machine is suspiciously resisted. Yet, once the State of Israel was in existence, the inveterate "unifiers" began to sigh for a set-up along the lines of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Had he been alive at that time, each member of Ihud would not merely have been watching the decline of the Empire; he would have been applauding every secession as a liberal victory. There is no formula valid here except that of separate political independence combined with regional cooperation.

ISRAEL'S economic contribution to Arab progress is a matter of example rather than of direct influence. In her thoughtful study, *Land, Disease and Poverty in the Middle East*, Miss Doreen Warriner takes

exception to the description of Arab society as feudal. She points out that feudalism had a sense of social responsibility, which the typical Arab social structure entirely lacks.

The social disabilities of the Middle East spring from no lack of resources or potentialities, but from obsolete methods of organization, distribution, and technique. The primary changes affecting Arab society are a rapid population increase and a tendency of urbanization, with a consequent shift from primary to secondary and tertiary occupations. Urbanization has not proceeded on anything like the European scale. In four decades of Western contact the urban population in Iraq has risen from 7 per cent to 9 per cent, and in Egypt from 9 per cent to 13 per cent. In Syria and the Lebanon the urban population has remained constant at 20 per cent. In the Arab sector of Palestine there has been a large absolute growth of both rural and urban population, but the relation between the two has remained constant.

Now this growth of population has not been accompanied by an expansion of resources or a development of techniques, as it was in Europe. Increasing multitudes have striven to subsist on static resources of wealth. The 3.5 per cent of Egypt's land which is regarded as cultivable must somehow sustain a population of 17 millions, as against 9 millions fifty years ago. The peasant's allotment grows smaller and smaller, obsolete methods of cultivation persist, and a rock-bottom of decline is reached with an agricultural population, disease-ridden and drowned in debt, living on an average *per capita* income of twenty dollars annually. This Arab poverty is so extreme that instead of becoming an incentive to reform it produces an apathy which forbids all changes. "The vast majority," writes Cleland, "have diseases which enervate their bodies and dull their minds, and diminish their ambitions to a sufficient extent so that they have no courage to face an adventure into some unknown area where they might improve their condition." Here we have the

phenomenon, rare in the Middle Eastern life, of a growing population extracting a dwindling subsistence from static resources. The usual pattern is quite different; it is of vast potential wealth and a population too meagre in numbers and poor in equipment to exploit it. The most startling example is Iraq. In Western terms, here is wealth untold—of land and power and water. But the social historian turns away from this potentiality to a disappointing reality. "The splendor of the past," wrote Zwemer, "can scarcely be believed because of the ruin of the present." The ruin is more concretely expressed in terms of a 60 per cent infant mortality, an average expectation of life of twenty-seven years, and 80 per cent of the population living below the annual subsistence level of fifty dollars per head. And this is at one extremity of the justly named Fertile Crescent, at whose other end the Lebanese villagers in many parts subsist on four piasters per day per head.

In Palestine there is the unique circumstance that a society based on scientific agriculture, skilled industry, and social cooperation is constructing itself upon the very doorstep of the Arab world. It has all the recommended ingredients of a Western society living in the Middle East; but it is not an Arab society. In a sense the problem of Hebrew culture and society is the mirrored opposite of that which the Arab world confronts. Arab society starts off with an Eastern environment to which it endeavors to adapt Western ideas. Jewish society starts off with Western ideas, which it must contrive to adapt to an Eastern environment. There is an objective historic harmony in this relationship, a basic affinity, more profound than the transient political deadlock which obscures it. The fact is that the Arab East needs scientific agriculture, the development of industry on the raw material of skill, the establishment of cooperative institutions, the harnessing of applied research to regional problems of health and development. No process which exemplifies these things is alien to its interest. Nor would it

be considered so if the political institutions of the Middle East expressed the ethnic and cultural diversity of the area, instead of imposing a spurious homogeneity based on one of its cultures, which has a right to predominance, but not to monopoly, in political rights.

The Near East has no alternative between a New Deal and a revolution. Israel may be the agent of the New Deal; and Arab minds which scoffed at social reform as an ideal in itself may come to accept it as the lesser evil when weighed against an otherwise inevitable upheaval.

THE frontiers demarcated on November 29 were based on the assumed necessity to create a separate and viable adjoining Arab state. If the effective occupation by King Abdullah becomes formalized, the collapse of this assumption will re-open the boundary question. West Galilee, now without its Arab population, is an obvious case for revision. Jerusalem, in effective Israeli control and territorially connected with Israel proper, will be difficult to internationalize, so long as the Trusteeship Council evinces its present apathy and the United Nations cannot even muster a thousand police. The Negev is likely to be the chief counter in territorial bargaining; and Israel's advantage lies in the certainty that nobody else will be able to show promise of development or irrigation there. In any boundary revision, the guiding principles of change are fixed by the military situation and the increase of the Arab hinterland through Transjordan with a consequent possibility of greater self-sufficiency in each of the territories.

The past three months have proved that the economic interdependence of all Palestine was much overrated by the General Assembly; the Israeli administrative services show no sign of handicap through being separate and free. If the neighboring unit is dominated by Transjordan, the contrast between centralized industrial Israel, and the loose-knit village structure of Arab society may be more significant than the need

for common social forms. The economic arrangements between Syria and Lebanon, or the Netherlands and Belgium may be a truer guide than the rigidities of an economic union in the fullest sense. To the task of economic reform is added that of mass resettlement. Nobody would have suggested the uprooting of Arab thousands deliberately in order to fulfill a tidy demographic plan. But after the event it is surely just as quixotic to recreate the huge minority problem which was partition's chief defect, at a time when the underpopulation of Syria, Iraq, and Transjordan are among the main causes of economic paralysis in the Near East.

THE disparate tendencies of Israel and the Arab states in international relations is largely a function of the war between them. Yet when Count Bernadotte advocated coordination of foreign policy between Israel and Greater Transjordan, he invited some scrutiny of the foreign policy of each. As long as Israel can hope to remain astride the gulf between the two worlds, it would be suicidal to abandon that posture. There are special ties and interests in Jewish life affecting Israel's foreign policy which have no application to Transjordan at all. Transjordan's foreign policy is at the moment based on gravitation towards a single ally, and complete military and financial dependence upon it. To "coordinate" this with Israel's United Nations orientation is an act of virtuosity. Here again it would be wise to avoid the determination to tie everything up together, to unite what God has put asunder, to seek an artificial unity where there is a natural divergence.

There is evidently no peaceful adjustment around the corner. The citizens of Israel have to learn to breathe the Eastern air and

be less nostalgic for Warsaw and Vienna. More serious still—the Arab world must undergo the full drastic crisis of recognizing Israel's permanence. Everybody who helps them towards that recognition is, in the historic sense, a friend of the Arabs. Mr. Bevin's attempts to lead a European coalition of Israel's non-recognizers are therefore as disastrous to real Arab-Jewish harmony as all his other efforts in that field.

In every field of Arab-Jewish relations, the keynote is the cooperation of equal and separate states—not the imposed union of divergent elements. In the social and economic problems of its environment, Israel has only to exist and prosper in order to play a catalytic role. Far from disrupting the existing patterns of inter-state cooperation, Israel's function is to broaden them beyond the narrow racial limits of the Arab League. The Arab League attempted unsuccessfully at Geneva to secure a United Nations edict for a Middle East Economic Commission with no Jewish participation. The absurdity of anything but a genuinely regional approach is herein blatantly revealed.

In international relations, it may be Israel's function to teach its neighbors how not to be satellites; a free nation may even refine oil. By strengthening their links with each other, both peoples may come to afford a less restless foreign policy, with the emphasis on economic and commercial interest, rather than a scramble for competitive support. The future of Arab-Jewish relations opens out in wide perspective only when two walls have been surmounted: the replacement of the truce by a peace settlement, and an effective if not a formal act of mutual recognition between Israel and an Arab authority able to guarantee peace on its frontiers.